

arts & culture

The Righteous Brothers Say Farewell to That Lovin' Feelin'

The soul duo stopped in The Villages for a show at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
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At 83, Bill Medley is still rocking.

The remaining Righteous Brother stopped in The Villages Wednesday as part of his "Lovin' Feelin' Farewell Tour," where he performed before a sold-out house at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Joining him on stage once again was his longtime friend and honorary Righteous Brother, Bucky Heard, as well as his daughter McKenna Medley.

"Some of you people have been coming to see The Righteous Brothers for about 55 years — God bless you," Medley said. "On behalf of my little brother, Bobby Hatfield, and myself, thank you for giving us such a wonderful life."

Often described as "one of the greatest soul duos of all time," Bill Medley and Bobby Hatfield formed The Righteous Brothers in 1962. The duo performed together for nearly four decades before Hatfield's passing in 2003.

However, at the behest of friends and family, Medley continued performing as The Righteous Brothers



The Righteous Brothers, Bucky Heard, left, and Bill Medley perform for the audience at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center on March 6.

alongside Bucky Heard. Together, the two have worked hard to honor both Hatfield's memory and the duo's decades-long legacy.

"It's a privilege to keep this music alive," Heard said to Medley. "I'm here as long as you need me."

Although Hatfield passed away more than 20 years ago, it felt almost as if a third Righteous Brother was onstage as Medley and Heard paid tribute to the duo's original tenor throughout the night.

Medley dedicated two songs to Hatfield: "Rock and

Roll Heaven" and "Unchained Melody." Each was warmly received by the crowd, but the favorite of the night was the oft-covered "Unchained Melody." Excited whispers rose from the audience at just the mention of the song.

"It's just a beautiful song," Medley said. "It's been recorded by about 5,000 to 6,000 times by 5,000 to 6,000 amazing singers, but nobody — nobody — did it like my little brother Bobby."

While not the original singer of the song, Hatfield was the original singer of The Righteous Brother's version of it.

Medley covered the song in his late friend's absence and as he sang, the stage's background was interspersed with stills and video clips of Medley and Hatfield together. One of the song's final lines, "God speed your love to me," faded out on a giant photo of Hatfield.

To sing "(I've Had) The Time of My Life," Medley was joined by his daughter, McKenna, who was recently off for a few months to deliver her new baby.

McKenna is a fixture in her father's shows, often performing as both his backup singer and a duet partner. She records music on her own as well and at Medley's request, sang a slower-paced version of "California Dreamin'."

After Heard gave a spirited rendition of "Nessun dorma," he and Medley closed the concert out with their Billboard Hot 100 No. 1 hit song "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'." The audience gave them a standing ovation, but not before Medley pointed out a few special guests in attendance.

"We have to leave, because there's some guys coming here tomorrow," Medley said.

Those "guys" were The Beach Boys, who were up in the premium box seats. The other California-based group was in town to perform two shows the next night.

Despite the years since The Righteous Brothers' heyday, Villagers left the concert

riding a fresh wave of rock 'n' roll exhilaration.

"I thought it was terrific," said Roger Searce, of the Village Sunset Pointe. "Music from the '60s and '70s, Bill Medley still up and going strong — I think it was a wonderful show."

Searce was there with his wife, Debbie. Both were fans of the original Righteous Brothers. "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" is their favorite song, with "Little Latin Lupe Lu," the Righteous Brothers first single, being a close second for Searce.

Other pleased fans included Ocala residents Joe and Matthew Crowell, who listen to The Righteous Brothers music all the time. Joe said the concert was great and that Heard made a fantastic substitute for Hatfield.

"Bobby was the original,

but Bucky was a good fill-in," Joe said. "It's a tragedy what happened — you know, all the time as I get older, these groups go away and it's like a chapter in my life closing, because I love the music so well."

Donna Good, Joe's partner, is also a big fan of The Righteous Brothers. She and her friend MaryAnne Stoutsenberger, a Village Pennecamp resident, attended two of the duo's concerts before and even got a photo with Medley and Heard a few years ago. Good said they are just as nice and personable as they were then.

"Bill Medley improves with age, just like a fine wine," Good said. "Bucky Heard will give you goose bumps."

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